

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION**

**103 DOC 225**

**PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY**

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<b>MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION</b>	<b>DIVISION: ADMINISTRATION</b>
<b>TITLE: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY</b>	<b>NUMBER: 103 DOC 225</b>

**PURPOSE:** To establish a policy regarding establishment and maintenance of professional boundaries between employees, contractors, and volunteers, with inmates, inmate family members and friends of inmates; to discourage and prevent violations of professional boundaries with inmates; to identify risk factors and warning signs of possible professional boundary violations by employees, contractors, and volunteers; and to establish uniform procedures for identifying, reporting, investigating, and resolving incidents of professional boundary violations with inmates in the Department of Correction (DOC).

**REFERENCES:** M.G.L. c. 268 § 21A

**APPLICABILITY:** All DOC Employees      **PUBLIC ACCESS:** Yes  
All Contractors  
All Volunteers

**LOCATION:** DOC Central Policy File  
Associate Commissioner of Administration's Policy File  
Institution's Policy Files  
Department Personnel Policy Manual

**RESPONSIBLE STAFF FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF POLICY:**

- Associate Commissioner of Administration
- Director of Human Resources
- Assistant Deputy Commissioners
- Director of Division of Staff Development
- Chief of the Office of Investigative Services
- Superintendents and Division Heads

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** 12/1/2006

**CANCELLATION:** 103 DOC 225.00 cancels all previous Department policy statements, bulletins, directives, orders, notices, rules or regulations regarding professional boundaries which are inconsistent.

**SEVERABILITY CLAUSE:** If any part of this policy, is for any reason, held to be unconstitutional, contrary to statute, in excess of the authority of the Commissioner, or otherwise inoperative such decision shall not affect any other part of this policy.

## **225.01      POLICY STATEMENT**

It is the policy of the Massachusetts Department of Correction to ensure that all employees, contractors, and volunteers maintain professional boundaries with inmates. Any act by an employee, contractor, or volunteer that violates professional boundaries is prohibited. All allegations and incidents involving the violations of professional boundaries shall be reported and fully investigated and may result in action ranging from discipline, including termination, to criminal prosecution. As part of its continuous effort to prevent violations of professional boundaries, the Department of Correction is committed to providing all staff with training regarding this policy.

## **225.02      DEFINITIONS**

Professional Boundaries - Relationships and interpersonal interactions by employees, contractors, and volunteers with inmates and the family members and friends of inmates that are impartial, limited to fulfill official duties, and that are within the boundaries of applicable federal and state laws, regulations, and other DOC policies. Such relationships and interpersonal interactions are those that a person would willingly have made known to a superior and any official authorized to inquire and investigate about them and ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. Professional boundaries are the space between a staff member's power and control over an inmate and the inmate's vulnerability to the misuse of that power and control. Violations of professional boundaries include but are not limited to misuse of power and control over an inmate; giving to or receiving from an inmate any unauthorized item; granting special privileges of any kind to an inmate; spending excessive time with an inmate that is not warranted by official duties; discussing the personal life or issues of any employee, including one's self, with an inmate or in the presence of an inmate; discussing the personal life or issues of another inmate with an inmate or in the presence of an inmate; engaging in any act that may undermine the ability of any employee to effectively manage an inmate. Similar behavior with the family member or friend of an inmate may also be a violation of a professional boundary. Staff sexual misconduct with inmates, which is a violation of professional boundaries, is prohibited by M.G.L. c. 268 § 21A and 103 DOC 519.00, Staff Sexual Misconduct with Inmates.

## **225.03      GENERAL GUIDELINES**

Violations of professional boundaries may occur between an employee, contractor, or volunteer and an inmate with whom that person is interacting.

1. While some violations of professional boundaries may be viewed as minor deviations from acceptable practices, such violations can contribute to careless practices, incompetence, and negligence that compromise the Department's core values and its ability to fulfill its mission.
2. It is the personal responsibility of each individual DOC employee, contractor, and volunteer to maintain professional boundaries with inmates with whom they interact. Furthermore, each individual supervisor and manager is responsible for identifying subordinates whose job duties or life circumstances may place them at a greater risk for violating professional boundaries; providing supervision and direction to those subordinates so that incidents of professional boundary violations can be prevented; and reporting violations of professional boundaries when they occur.
3. When boundaries are blurred or non-existent inmates may develop inappropriate relationships with staff, which may compromise staff's professionalism and significantly jeopardize the operation of the Department's institutions and divisions.
4. Undue familiarity with an inmate may lead to violations of professional boundaries which may also be violations of criminal law and place the violator at risk of criminal prosecution. Such violations may include giving to or receiving gifts or other unauthorized items of value from an inmate or the family member of an inmate or engaging in sexual misconduct with an inmate.
5. Employees, contractors, and volunteers from every discipline and rank who work within a Department of Correction facility are at potential risk for violating professional boundaries.
6. Individual life circumstances may make some employees, contractors, and volunteers more vulnerable and at higher risk than others for violating professional boundaries.

Risk factors for violations of professional boundaries include but are not limited to:

- a. life crises such as the death of a family member or divorce;
  - b. personal or family illness;
  - c. financial difficulties;
  - d. major life transitions such as retirement or demotion;
  - e. low self-esteem;
  - f. job dissatisfaction or poor relationships with peers and coworkers;
  - g. physical and/or social isolation from other staff.
7. There may be warning signs or "red flags" that an employee, contractor, or volunteer may be at risk of violating or has violated professional boundaries. These warning signs may include:
- a. sudden changes in appearance or dress;
  - b. spending excessive time with a particular inmate;
  - c. self-disclosure of personal problems or intimate details of one's life to an inmate;
  - d. asking an inmate about personal information except on a "need to know" basis;
  - e. giving to or receiving unauthorized items from an inmate;
  - f. inappropriate communication with an inmate such as excessive joking or sexual talk;
  - g. inappropriate communication with an inmate's family member or friend outside of their professional capacity;
  - h. touching an inmate, such as patting, pinching, or repeated brushing up against the person;
  - i. relaxing enforcement of rules with a certain inmate;
  - j. when being guarded, sensitive or defensive interactions with a particular inmate are brought into question;
  - k. doing or receiving favors for or from an inmate;
  - l. responding to routine requests in a different manner for different inmates.
9. The attire of employees, contractors, and volunteers is important in establishing professional boundaries with inmates. For this reason it is important that a professional appearance be maintained at all times. Staff who are required to wear a uniform must meet the standards in 103 DOC 224 - Uniforms. Non-uniformed staff must wear

clothing that is clean, pressed, and in good repair. This clothing must not be overly casual or inappropriate for wearing in a correctional environment. It is not the intention of this section to dictate fashion or taste but to provide a framework within which professional attire is attained. Clothing that is not appropriate for wearing in a correctional environment includes but is not limited to :

- a. Jeans or any clothing made of denim of any color
  - b. Sweat clothing
  - c. Warm up suits
  - d. Tee shirts
  - e. Transparent or sheer clothing and low cut clothing tops
  - f. Shorts
  - g. Tank tops and halter tops
  - h. Slogans on clothing except for discrete manufacturer's logos
  - i. Visible underwear
  - j. Sneakers, work boots, sandals, shoes with a heel greater than 4" in height. Direct care medical staff such as LPN's, RN's, Certified Nursing Assistants and Mental Health Workers shall be permitted to wear sneakers. Storeroom staff are permitted to wear work boots and/or sneakers.
  - k. Extremely tight or loose fitting clothing
  - l. Short skirts and dresses
  - m. Shirts and blouses which leave any portion of the midriff exposed
10. While employees, contractors, and volunteers may be able to recognize themselves that they are at high risk for violating professional boundaries, those staff who have the most interaction with them such as their peers and first line supervisors are more likely to make this identification. First line supervisors play an especially key role in the identification of a staff member or volunteer who may be at risk for violating professional boundaries. Because prevention of boundary violations is so important, first line supervisors must be aware of the risk factors and warning signs and must intervene when they believe that a staff member is at potential risk for violating professional boundaries. Such proactive intervention may include informal counseling of the staff member; providing training regarding professional boundaries; suggesting that the employee seek the assistance of the Stress Unit or the Employee Assistance

Program; or consultation by the first line supervisor with his/her immediate supervisor.

#### **225.04      REPORTING**

1. All allegations and incidents of professional boundary violations with inmates must be immediately reported verbally by an employee or contractor to the Superintendent or Division Head and followed up with a Confidential Incident Report prior to the end of his or her shift. During non-business hours these allegations and incidents must be reported to the Shift Commander who shall then immediately notify the Superintendent. Failure of any employee or contractor to report these allegations may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
2. Depending upon the seriousness of the incident or allegation, the Superintendent or Division Head may need to notify his/her manager immediately and follow-up with an Urgent Matter Report.

#### **225.05      INVESTIGATION**

1. All allegations of professional boundary violations that may violate any DOC regulation, policy, or rule and may require investigation shall be reported to the Office of Investigative Services pursuant to 103 DOC 522, Internal Affairs Unit.
2. It shall be the responsibility of the Chief of Investigative Services to review and assess all reports and allegations of professional boundary violations and determine what course of action shall be taken regarding the investigation of those alleged violations as required by 103 DOC 522, Internal Affairs Unit.

#### **225.06      SELECTION AND HIRING**

1. As part of the process by which employees and contractors are selected and hired, the Director of Human Resources shall ensure that the pre-employment background investigation shall include an appropriate inquiry regarding any professional boundary violation problems with inmates, patients, clients, students, or similar persons in their care that the prospective employees or contractors may have had in their current or previous jobs.



2. The Director of the Program Services Division shall develop a procedure that provides for volunteer applicants, prior to their actual selection as a volunteer, being asked as part of the selection process if they have had difficulties regarding professional boundary violations in current or former employment or volunteer situations.
3. Information obtained as a result of these inquiries shall be used as part of the selection and hiring decision-making process.

#### **225.07 STAFF TRAINING**

The DOC is committed to educating all staff members on the issues of professional boundary violations. This training shall be conducted during all basic recruit training classes, orientation training for new employees who do not attend basic recruit training, in-service training, and all volunteer orientation programs. In addition all staff members who are newly promoted to supervisory and management positions shall receive training about the important role that supervisors and managers play in the prevention and identification of professional boundary violations. This training will occur as scheduling allows. Training shall include but not be limited to recognizing, preventing, reporting, and investigating incidents of professional boundaries with inmates. The important role of supervisors and managers in the prevention of professional boundary violations shall be emphasized in this training.

#### **225.08 OPERATIONAL ISSUES**

1. Inmate workers, especially in situations that involve cross gender supervision, shall be rotated periodically.
2. The prevention of professional boundary violations may require the reassignment of inmates from certain health care, program, and classification staff to other staff for provision of those services.